

# The Role of Governments in Legislative Agenda Setting

*Edited by*

**Bjørn Erik Rasch and  
George Tsebelis**



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George Tsebelis**



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# The Role of Governments in Legislative Agenda Setting

Setting the agenda for parliament is the most significant institutional weapon for governments to shape policy outcomes, because governments with significant agenda setting powers, like France or the UK, are able to produce the outcomes they prefer, while governments that lack agenda setting powers, such as the Netherlands and Italy in the beginning of the period examined, see their projects significantly altered by their parliaments.

With a strong comparative framework, this coherent volume examines 14 countries and provides a detailed investigation into the mechanisms by which governments in different countries determine the agendas of their corresponding parliaments. It explores the three different ways that governments can shape legislative outcomes: institutional, partisan and positional, to make an important contribution to legislative politics.

It will be of interest to students and scholars of comparative politics, legislative studies/parliamentary research, governments/coalition politics, political economy and policy studies.

**Bjørn Erik Rasch** is Professor of Political Science and Academic Director of the interfaculty Research Programme on Democracy at the University of Oslo. **George Tsebelis** is the Anatol Rapoport Collegiate Professor of Political Science at the University of Michigan.

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# Preface

This book had a very long gestation period. Back in the mid 1990s, we were both impressed by the depth of the theoretical work on agenda setting, and the paucity of empirical work on the matter. With the exception of the pioneering work of Döring (1995a and b) which still remains unparalleled, it was as if the rational choice institutionalism which dominated both theoretical and empirical studies in American politics was completely ignored in the study of Parliamentary systems.

In 1996 we submitted a workshop proposal for the ECPR Joint Sessions in Bern, on the role of government in parliamentary agenda setting. Conforming to the traditions, we submitted the proposal along with the names of people that would be interested in participating, and we received a resounding rejection on the grounds that the subject did not have sufficient interest for the profession. It should not come as a surprise that it took us long time to recover.

Our second attempt was successful, and we organized a workshop in Granada in 2005. Participants at that workshop were Natalia Ajenjo, Aris Alexopolos, Thomas Bräuninger, Sylvain Brouard, Eugénia da Conceição-Heldt, Herbert Döring, Christoph Hönnige, Silke Köster-Riemann, Tatiana Rizova, Daniel Schwarz, Ulrich Sieberer and Francesco Zucchini. We were all impressed by the quality of the work, and decided to proceed with (1) organizing our collective thoughts through a common sequence of questions that each empirical chapter would address (presented in the introduction of this volume), (2) providing revisions for the stronger papers, and (3) adding some more countries in the initial mix (Denmark, Hungary, Japan, Portugal, Russia, Spain, The Netherlands and United Kingdom).

The enterprise took several more years to be completed, but we are very pleased to present the outcome of this collective effort to our colleagues. Lots of people participated in these efforts, and given the length of time that took until completion of the project, we want to apologize in advance for maybe missing some of the names of people that helped.

A special thank to Herbert Döring and Thomas Bräuninger for comments in the early phases of the project. We are grateful to Thomas Poguntke, the series editor, and three anonymous referees for invaluable comments and advice.

We want to thank Sara K. Eriksen (Oslo), Are T. Flaten (Oslo), Lisa Blaydes (UCLA at the time and now at Stanford) and Cassie Grafstrom (Mich-

igan) for excellent research assistance. The index has been prepared by Are Flaten.

Finally, Bjørn Erik Rasch owes a debt of gratitude to Randi Ferkingstad, Benedicte and Henriette. George Tsebelis thanks Barbara Koremenos and Selene Koremenos-Tsebelis for their love and for their support (the second in particular provided life-long support to the project).

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